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Chairman: Mr. Kiwanuka ..... (Uganda)
later: Mr. Lewis (Vice-Chairman)..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 87: Questions relating to information (A/55/21 and A/55/452)

1. **The Chairman** said that, in accordance with its programme of work, the Committee would begin its consideration of agenda item 87 entitled "Questions relating to information".

2. **Mr. Hogen** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the efforts of the Department of Public Information to build support for and promote the Millennium Summit were a reflection of the importance of public information and communication within the framework of the United Nations activities. An effective promotional campaign, including the Secretary-General's Millennium Report, had resulted in overwhelmingly positive media coverage for the Summit. During the preparations for the Millennium Summit, the Department had launched a new long-term campaign to disseminate information about the positive impact of the work of the United Nations on the everyday lives of people around the world. The Administrative Committee on Coordination had recently adopted a campaign entitled "The United Nations works" as a system-wide strategy in order to put a human face on the work of the United Nations; a series of visual materials and a special web site featured stories about individuals who had benefited from United Nations initiatives and projects.

3. No fewer than seven major conferences had been planned for the following year. Some of those conferences would be unprecedented covering such issues as the AIDS epidemic, illicit trade in small arms and financing for development. One of the aims of the conferences was to generate public support and the political will of Governments and other key actors, and to mobilize resources. In other words, there would be a transition from advocacy to action, and the Department of Public Information would play an important role in that regard.

4. In the area of peace and security, the Department of Public Information had widely disseminated the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations. Two reports of the Secretary-General (A/55/502 and A/55/507) on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Panel's report were also before the General Assembly. With regard to the issues of disarmament and small arms, the Department had, together with the Department for Disarmament Affairs, recently launched a new exhibition and produced a documentary on small arms. The Department of Public Information was also assisting the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General with the preparations for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001. The web page for the Year would be launched on the United Nations web site on 16 November 2000.

5. In order to achieve the objective of greater openness and transparency in the work of the United Nations, the Department had held a communication workshop for senior officials at the Under-Secretary-General level, and the insights gained from that session would be applied in similar training programmes the following year. In addition, the Department was constantly looking to expand its efforts to organize briefing programmes for journalists.

6. New technologies should be embraced in the new information age. The Internet and other electronic media were vital tools used by the Department in its outreach efforts. The News Centre launched on the United Nations web site the previous year had become a gateway for news and events across the entire United Nations system. Preparations for the development of an international United Nations radio service had begun the previous year, and he was pleased to announce that, in September 2000, the Department had launched a broadcast radio project in the six official languages. As a result of the broadcasts, the Department was able to provide a wide audience with up-to-date information on important events within the United Nations, both at Headquarters and in the field.

7. The radio pilot project had been developed and launched under the guidance of the Committee on Information, with the approval of the General Assembly. Its success depended to a large extent on support from Member States and their broadcasting companies, without which, United Nations Radio, which did not have its own transmission facilities, would face an impossible task. In that connection, it should be noted that broadcasting companies in the African region had enthusiastically supported the initiative and were providing airtime for United Nations Radio programmes. Furthermore, there was an increased demand from broadcasting companies for video services and television products. In that regard, he was pleased to report that the Department of Public

Information was organizing the fifth United Nations World Television Forum at Headquarters on 16 and 17 November — an event expected to attract approximately 1,000 representatives from the television industry.

8. The Department had been making use of the Internet and new technologies as well as traditional means of communication making it possible, through the United Nations web site, to provide live coverage of such United Nations events as the Millennium Summit, the general debate of the Millennium Assembly, several regular and special sessions of the General Assembly, and high-level meetings of other United Nations bodies. The Department's coordinating role in Internet publishing had been strengthened through the approval by the Publications Board of guidelines for material appearing on the web. Those guidelines would streamline procedures for the creation of web pages by various units of the Secretariat, the regional commissions, peacekeeping missions and information centres. In addition to the United Nations web site in the six official languages, information was also made available in 17 local languages on the web sites managed by United Nations information centres and services worldwide. During 2000 the number of visits to United Nations web sites had exceeded 300 million.

9. The United Nations information centres had an important role, working mainly with Government authorities and the mass media and providing news on United Nations events. Their audiences had come to include non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and youth. Lately, because of the Secretary-General's initiatives, many information centres had added the business community to their partners. The nature of their work had also changed over the years, and in addition to their traditional role of disseminating information from Headquarters, the centres were actively engaged in the development of information strategies. Developments in communications technology had made a tremendous impact on the productivity of information centres and had led to a vast increase in the quantity of information available.

10. Another important area of the Department's work was its services to the public. Over the past year, a number of exhibits visited by participants in the guided tour at Headquarters had been updated and improved. In addition to direct contact through the guided tours, group programmes and special activities for students and teachers had been developed. Many of the Department's information materials were designed with students in mind, and they were also available in electronic form on the CyberSchoolBus, the educational component of the United Nations web site.

11. The Department was continuing its efforts to provide opportunities for professional training for journalists and broadcasters. For example, nine participants from Gaza and the West Bank were currently taking part in the Department's training programme for Palestinian media practitioners. In addition, from 28 August to 6 October the twentieth annual training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries had taken place at Headquarters, with participants from 18 countries. Over the 20 years since the programme had been established, it had trained a growing number of specialists who could help to raise awareness of the work of the United Nations in the developing world.

12. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library, through its use of electronic delivery of information, multilingualism and outreach to depository libraries, had made information available to a growing audience both within and outside the Organization. In September 2000, its database, known as UNBISNET, had been launched on the Internet, to provide access to United Nations documentation and to statements made by Member States. He was pleased to report that, as of 1 January 2001, depository libraries would be permitted to substitute access to the optical disk system for hard-copy distribution of their documents. Furthermore, the Treaty Database had been made available free of charge to depository libraries in developing countries.

13. The outreach of the *Africa Recovery* information programme continued to grow; the number of its subscribers was increasing and its material was often found in national publications and radio programmes in Africa. Also, the *UN Chronicle* offered information on the work of the Organization and its human impact and coverage of its less visible activities, which nevertheless affected the lives of people, including such issues as health, development, United Nations reform, the environment, peacekeeping, disarmament, the work of the organizations of the United Nations system and other topics. In addition, twice monthly a self-financing publication, *Development Business*, was issued, which provided procurement information on development projects and other opportunities financed by the United Nations system, the leading multilateral

banks, and State agencies. In January of 1999, an online version of that publication had been inaugurated. The Department had also addressed the issues of sales and marketing of United Nations publications and the dissemination of maps and geographical information, which played an important role in activities in such areas as peace-making, preventive diplomacy and socio-economic development.

14. **Mr. Mulyana** (Rapporteur of the Committee on Information), introducing the report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-second session (A/55/21), said that the report contained five chapters. Chapter I clarified the mandate of the Committee and provided an overview of its activities. Chapter II dealt with organizational questions. Chapter III was devoted to general debate by representatives of Member States and their consideration of substantive questions. Many speakers had called for a new, more just and effective world information and communications order. While the flow of information was a global phenomenon, the spread of information technology remained restrictive in nature. In that connection, the United Nations had an important role to play in bridging the digital divide. A number of speakers had suggested that the Department of Public Information (DPI) could assist developing countries in improving their capacity in the information field, particularly through the United Nations information centres and the training programmes for journalists and also by working with Governments in developing countries on United Nations courses for educational curricula.

15. All delegations had supported the reorientation of DPI, which had been initiated by the Secretary-General to strengthen the role of public information and to create a culture of communication within the Organization. Delegations had commended the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information and his staff to carry out their activities with increased efficiency and effectiveness and had expressed their appreciation for the many useful reports before the Committee, which had been circulated in a timely manner. All speakers had supported the determination on the part of the United Nations to empower itself in the new millennium as a body capable of meeting a wide range of challenges. In that connection, a number of delegations had supported the Millennium promotional campaign which would use opportunities to better connect the peoples of the world to the United Nations. All speakers had supported the Department's use of new information technologies, in particular the United Nations web site, to widely disseminate information about the Organization. At the same time, they had strongly urged the continued use of the traditional media — print, radio and television — in outreach activities. Several delegations had noted that the Department was proposing an integrated multimedia news operation, aimed at delivery of United Nations news directly to media organizations worldwide, which would improve access for developing countries. All speakers had commended the Department for its important work in maintaining and enriching the United Nations web site, which was of tremendous interest worldwide, and had supported the multilingual enrichment of the United Nations web site, which had played a significant role in the achievement of greater parity in all six official languages. Many speakers had been in favour of the launch of direct broadcasting by the United Nations and had expressed support for the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity. All speakers had stressed the importance of the work of the Department in the area of sustainable human development. It had been the view of a number of speakers that heightened focus should be given to publicizing the Organization's activities and accomplishments in such areas as poverty eradication, health, education, the rights of women and combating terrorism, drugs and international crime. A number of delegations had expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Department of Public Information to improve public awareness about United Nations peacekeeping missions.

16. The information resources of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library had been highly commended. All delegations had praised the work of the United Nations information centres, which represented the face of the United Nations in 65 countries around the world. Many speakers had agreed that integration was a positive process to pool resources and unify the Organization's image; however, they had stressed that it should be done on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the host country. Several speakers had said that information centres should make their facilities available for educational purposes, for example to expand public access to new technologies. To that end, the staff of the centres should be trained in, among other things, the creation of web sites to adequately reflect the culture of the region.

17. Chapter IV presented the results of the consideration of nine reports of the Secretary-General. During the debate, delegations had raised such issues as the costs of conversion of television transmissions from analog to digital format; the income being generated for the Organization by the United Nations Treaty Series online; an overview of United Nations activities aimed at African countries; the effectiveness of campaigns against acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and on natural disasters, such as cyclones; the theme of dialogue among civilizations; details of the plans for the United Nations system pavilion at the upcoming Hannover 2000 exposition; the newly converted permanent posts in the web site operation as an indication of the Department's determination to enforce General Assembly resolutions on language parity; and the sharp reduction in staffing levels in the information centres in the past decade.

18. Chapter V contained a draft resolution entitled "Information in the service of humanity", which remained unchanged, and a draft resolution entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities". In conclusion, he said that during the course of the twenty-second session of the Committee on Information, a whole range of different issues had been successfully examined, and solutions identified on the basis of consensus. That had been possible thanks to the spirit of cooperation, flexibility and pragmatism manifested by all delegations.

19. *Mr. Lewis (Antigua and Barbuda), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

20. **Mr. Radolf** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that in November 1989 the General Conference had reaffirmed the mandate of UNESCO in the field of information and communication by adopting a new Communication Strategy to encourage a wider and more balanced flow of information without any obstacles to freedom of expression. During the 1990s, UNESCO, jointly with the Department of Public Information (DPI), had organized five regional seminars on promoting pluralistic and independent media in Windhoek, Almaty, Santiago, Sana'a and Sofia. Those seminars — in which journalists, representatives of non-governmental organizations and government officials from countries in the regions concerned had participated — had provided an opportunity to discuss issues of freedom of expression in the context of the activities of the press, and problems of democracy and development. The General Assembly, in connection with the adoption in 1991 of the Declaration of Windhoek, had declared 3 May to be World Press Freedom Day.

21. In May in Geneva, a two-day round table on media in areas of conflict and post-conflict peace-building had been held to commemorate World Press Freedom Day. United Nations officials had actively participated in the round table and had played an important role in the drafting of recommendations for future action to strengthen, rebuild or establish independent media in areas of conflict and post-conflict peace-building. The following year, the main celebration for World Press Freedom Day would take place on 3 May in Namibia, exactly 10 years to the day since the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration. The ceremony, at which the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize would be awarded, would be followed by a two-and-a-half day working seminar to assess progress made in promoting press freedom in Africa during the past decade, and prospects for the future.

22. In many conflict zones, UNESCO played a pioneer role by contributing to activities to promote an independent news media. For more than six years, UNESCO had provided assistance to independent media in the Balkan region seeking to exercise their right to freedom of expression, a sine qua non condition for the provision of non-partisan information to local populations. Activities in that field were also carried out in other regions of the world. In addition, UNESCO had undertaken various initiatives to promote exchanges and cooperation between media professionals belonging to antagonistic national, ethnic or religious groups, so that they might together analyse their attitudes towards each other and thus use dialogue to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding conducive to the easing of tensions and to reconciliation. The establishment of press houses in Rwanda and Burundi, open to Tutsi and Hutu journalists, and the creation in Latin America of the REDIPAZ network offered two examples of such action.

23. In partnership with other agencies in the United Nations system, UNESCO had undertaken a number of new initiatives to promote the development of information and communication technologies. It was thus that UNESCO had actively participated in preparations for that year's session of the Economic

and Social Council, including by organizing a panel of experts on building greater access to information through the use of information and communication technologies. That panel, established under the auspices of the United Nations, had examined such issues as increasing the body of information in the public domain, providing training at the local as well as the national level in the use of information and communication technologies, the development of digital libraries and the development of materials relevant to local populations in local languages. That day (Monday, 13 November) marked the opening at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO of a three-day conference, "INFOethics 2000", bringing together experts from the United Nations system and other organizations to examine the aforementioned issues in greater depth, as well as issues pertaining to copyright and the fair use of information. UNESCO also hoped to play a role in the activities of the information and communication technologies task force that the United Nations planned to establish in the near future.

24. UNESCO had contributed significantly towards efforts to establish a number of community radio projects and to set up multi-purpose community telecentres in many developing countries. UNESCO had been proposed as the lead agency for the development of multimedia community centres designed for an array of uses including radio and for merging information and communication technologies to give a synergistic effect. UNESCO continued to pay great attention to the development of traditional media — television, radio and print — through its promotion of training programmes and through its International Programme for the Development of Communication. At its session in March 1999, the International Programme had approved the allocation of more than $1.8 million to projects in developing countries and emerging States, as well as $140,000 as support for training activities. Many such projects and activities had been specifically earmarked to increase training and career opportunities for women in the field of communication.

25. **Mr. Al-Rumaitu** (United Arab Emirates) said that it was vital to create a new multidimensional world communications system to serve the interests of peace and security and to contribute to achieving sustainable development. With the current system, problems affecting developing countries were not taken into account; moreover, premeditated attempts were being made to distort their history, culture and fundamental beliefs. International organizations should assist such countries in developing their human resources in the fields of information and communication and help them to acquire the necessary technologies.

26. The United Nations was making a significant contribution to the quest for solutions to global cultural, economic, environmental protection and other problems. Today, as never before, information must be used as a tool for achieving the noble purposes of the Organization. He stressed the need for capacity-building in the field of human resources development in regional centres. The issue was of the utmost significance for developing countries.

27. The United Nations was successfully utilizing modern information and communications technology and had managed to combine them with traditional outreach methods. However, the principle of parity between official languages was not always respected with respect to the dissemination of information materials through the Internet. It was vital to ensure that on the United Nations web site, Arabic had parity with the other languages of the Organization. In so doing, the Department of Public Information would increase public awareness about its programmes and reach out in principle to a new audience. Furthermore, the Department of Public Information in its information materials should devote more attention to topical and burning issues in international politics, such as the question of Palestine. It was a question, not just of the history of that issue, but also of the current sufferings of the Palestinian people as a result of measures implemented by Israel. The fact that Israeli policy resulted in new Palestinian deaths each day must not be ignored.

28. **Mr. Rani Ismail Hadi** (Malaysia) said that the Department of Public Information (DPI) had fully embraced information and communications technology, although the traditional means of disseminating information via radio and television should not be forgotten, especially given the great digital divide that existed between developed and developing countries, to which the Secretary-General had referred in his report to the Millennium Assembly. In order to bridge the current global divide between the richest and poorest countries, serious efforts and initiatives were needed, such as the establishment of a United Nations information technology service. Some developing countries, including Malaysia, had themselves taken

steps to bridge that divide, proceeding from the assumption that, in the information age, being left behind in information technology was more dangerous than economic backwardness. It was especially important to bridge the digital divide at a time when information technology was entering every aspect of human activity.

29. The digital divide was exacerbated by globalization, the adverse effects of which were giving rise to well-founded concerns among many. In order to overcome those obstacles and to enter the information age, there was a need for efforts and initiatives aimed at building new processes, institutions and organizations. Many countries urgently needed to remove their domestic barriers to the dissemination of information. It must not be forgotten, however, that the information age, which held out the promise of shared prosperity, also harboured the threat of economic exploitation, social disintegration and a new era of imperialism and colonialism.

30. **Mr. Mollema** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the Western Group, after alluding to the rapid spread of technological innovations in the field of public information and communication, said that the so-called digital divide that was emerging must be bridged through investment in education and development of the appropriate infrastructure. In the light of the revolutionary changes taking place in the field of information technology, many ideas about the role of information had become obsolete, and there was a need to find new ways to ensure the freedom to seek, receive and impart information envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

31. The fact that at least 39 journalists across the world had been killed while carrying out their professional activities was a cause for concern. His delegation condemned the use of violence against journalists and any attempts to obstruct their work, as well as attempts to influence the media for whatever purpose. The United Nations was endeavouring, in a rapidly changing environment of new technologies and opportunities, to bring its message to the populations of all the countries of the world. That daunting task required further improvement in the Organization's activities in the field of public information. New strategies and approaches were needed in order to increase the effectiveness of those activities, including utilization of the Internet, which was gradually replacing more traditional means of communication and information.

32. The Department of Public Information must address the problems arising in connection with the new technologies by setting its priorities and distributing its resources in such a way as to take into account, in each specific instance, the needs of the audience. One of the most important tasks consisted in rationalizing the structure of the web sites and preparing material for them in all the official languages, for linguistic diversity was a crucial and integral part of United Nations information policy. Another argument for more effective prioritization in the work of DPI was the need to disseminate convincing and clear information on United Nations peacekeeping activities, in accordance with the recommendations for the improvement of United Nations peace operations contained in the Brahimi report.

33. **Mr. Valdivieso** (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Organization was making ever greater use of the new communications and information technologies. The United Nations web site was being continuously expanded with material provided by departments, and Internet use would continue to grow. The goal of the Rio Group remained to ensure greater parity in the content of each site in the six official languages of the United Nations. Access to information and communications technologies was not enjoyed by the entire population of the countries of the Rio Group, and it was therefore important to maintain the traditional means of disseminating information, such as radio and television, which had greater reach in developing countries. The countries members of the Rio Group welcomed the Secretary-General's initiatives to expand and improve United Nations radio broadcasts in the various languages.

34. He also noted with satisfaction the organization of training courses for journalists from developing countries. He believed that the number of such courses should be increased and participation in them expanded. The countries of the Rio Group attached great importance to United Nations information centres in the field, which ensured that communities understood the various issues that the Organization was addressing in the political, economic and social spheres, and in the fields of disarmament and promotion and protection of human rights. As to the merging of the information centres with the field

offices of the United Nations Development Programme, that issue must be studied on a case-by-case basis, always in consultation with the authorities of the host country.

35. It had been proposed within the framework of the ongoing review of United Nations peacekeeping activities that there should be changes affecting the size of the Department of Public Information. Such changes would entail a reduction of the Department's functions and the transfer of parts of DPI to other units. Member States had an interest in increasing the effectiveness of United Nations activities relating to the maintenance of peace and security. All key decisions must, however, be taken with the consent of Member States. In making changes, the need to preserve the quality and quantity of the Organization's information services must be taken into account.

36. **Mr. Pohan** (Indonesia) said that the world revolution in information and communication technology provided an opportunity to improve the lives of people and make progress in various areas of human activity. However, the achievements of developed countries in that regard were not being matched in the developing countries. On the contrary, in many of those countries the situation was deteriorating. In circumstances where it was common not to have access to sufficient resources, the development of information and communications technology was highly detrimental, not only to the building of the State in many countries, but also to the distribution of resources necessary for development. As the Secretary-General had noted in his report to the Millennium Summit, the "digital divide" remained a major problem for the United Nations in the twenty-first century — a fact borne out by statistics indicating that billions of people in the world were still untouched by the information revolution.

37. He strongly supported the initiative of the Secretary-General to establish a United Nations Information Technology Service, which would undoubtedly help to bridge the "digital divide". Developing countries would, in turn, have to step up their efforts to develop their own information opportunities by cooperating among themselves and enlisting the services of the private sector. In that connection, the importance of the work of the Committee on Information, especially its adoption of draft resolution A entitled "Information in the service of humanity", which provided a sound basis for further work, could not be overestimated.

38. With regard to United Nations information activities, he emphasized the importance of the dissemination of comprehensive, objective and equitable information on the Organization through the use of the latest technologies and, in the case of many developing countries, the traditional media, such as radio and television. The Department of Public Information should give more thorough coverage to the major areas of sustainable development, such as poverty eradication, health care and education. It was also important to ensure that all the United Nations information centres had the necessary resources for the further improvement of their work.

39. The distribution by the United Nations of comprehensive, objective and equitable information played an important role in the maintenance of peace and security, and, in particular, in the organization of peacekeeping operations. In that connection, it was important to adjust working relations between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations during the planning and conduct of missions.

40. **Mr. Hafiana** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that, on the threshold of the third millennium, information should be disseminated through the media, satellite communication systems and the Internet without any limitations. The developed countries, which had a monopoly on the mass media, were using them for self-seeking purposes. As a result there was a serious danger that some European media in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya were knowingly disseminating false information on the situation in some third-world countries. A propaganda campaign was being waged against the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya with the aim of distorting the true state of affairs under cover of loyalist phrases. The international community should stand firm to ensure that every single country had access to information. The information culture and effective instruments essential within the framework of the United Nations would promote mutual understanding among different peoples and cultures and ensure that the international public was given reliable information in the interests of international peace and security.

41. The information world should be fairer and more accessible and guarantee respect for cultural

differences. The right of peoples to be culturally unique, to profess their own faith and to oppose intolerance should also be respected. Information played a key role in promoting the ideas of the United Nations and disseminating information on United Nations programmes throughout the world, including the goals of peacekeeping operations. Assistance should be provided to the Department of Public Information in that regard, and the role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security should be enhanced.

42. His delegation welcomed the efforts of the Administration, the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information to prepare specialists on information and communication issues. It also welcomed the role of UNESCO in the area of publications and emphasized the importance of using Arabic as an official language of the United Nations for interpretation, in official documents and in materials disseminated over the Internet, thereby ensuring that Arabic was on a par with the other official languages of the United Nations, which played a key role in the dissemination of information, particularly in the interests of the developing countries. The work of the information centre in Libya under the leadership of the UNDP resident representative was also of particular importance.

43. **Mr. Singhara Na Ayudhaya** (Thailand) said that Member States as well as the United Nations should employ all the means at their disposal to educate the people at large about the important role of the United Nations so that they might appreciate the benefits of its activities. Thailand welcomed the efforts and initiatives of the Secretary-General to make communication a central theme of the reform and revitalization of United Nations activities. Owing to a lack of personnel with local language proficiency, not enough had yet been done to improve peoples' understanding of the role of the United Nations. In order to overcome that shortcoming, the United Nations should, through its respective agencies, facilitate cooperation with United Nations associations in different countries, including Thailand, in order to disseminate information about the United Nations in local languages and provide support.

44. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand was launching a United Nations promotion campaign to enhance public understanding of the role of the United Nations and its impact on the day-to-day lives of people. Throughout the year, in cooperation with other organizations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would be carrying out a wide range of activities. However, national activities could only supplement the role of United Nations information centres. There were approximately 60 United Nations information centres around the world, which could not operate at full capacity owing to a shortage of staff and funding.

45. **Mr. Mangachi** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the Millennium Summit had underscored the importance of information and communications technology as crucial factors in the process of globalization and the liberalization of the world economy. However, the gap between developed and developing countries continued to widen, with the majority of developing countries not benefiting from the current information revolution. In that regard, in order to reduce existing imbalances, his delegation called upon the international community, particularly its development partners and other stakeholders, to increase assistance for the strengthening of communications infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, especially in Africa.

46. His delegation supported the position of the Committee on Information that traditional means of disseminating information, particularly through radio, print and — in some cases — television, should continue to be used, especially in least developed countries. In that connection, his delegation supported the efforts under way by the Department of Public Information to increase the number of United Nations Radio programmes. Information should be disseminated in an impartial manner directly to radio and television stations throughout the world, in the official languages of the United Nations and other languages. The Tanzanian delegation supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to enhance the effectiveness of the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, including by increasing its stock of relevant books and journals and ensuring that United Nations information and other vital materials were made available through electronic and traditional means to a growing number of readers and users.

47. His delegation fully supported the strengthening of United Nations information centres in the context of the reform proposals. United Nations information centres should continue to disseminate information on United Nations activities and accomplishments in such areas as social and economic development, poverty eradication, debt relief, health, education gender

issues, children's rights, environmental and other relevant issues. The development of human and technical resources was crucial for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries. His delegation greatly appreciated the support afforded by the Department of Public Information to the realization of practical training programmes in a number of developing countries and also welcomed the annual training programmes for journalists and television and radio broadcasters from developing countries.

48. **Mr. Obadi** (Yemen) said that in recent years achievements in the field of information technology had had an impact on all spheres of human activity. The media had become a vital component of democracy and development, and the free flow of information was one of the characteristics of globalization. Nevertheless, the gap between developed and developing countries was widening, and the United Nations should play an important role in reducing that gap by assisting developing countries to strengthen their media capabilities, including with the help of United Nations information centres, training programmes for journalists and the organization of seminars and practical workshops for representatives of developing countries.

49. His delegation wished to make some comments concerning the United Nations Information Centre in Sana'a. The Government of Yemen accorded great importance to the work of that Information Centre in disseminating information on United Nations programmes and activities in the Arabic and English languages. Regrettably, the Department of Public Information had not yet appointed a new director for the Centre to replace the previous head. The Centre fulfilled an important function and provided information for the public, academics, students, journalists, the creative intelligentsia and non-governmental organizations. The Government of Yemen had always supported the establishment of United Nations information centres in as many countries as possible, particularly in developing countries, which continued to encounter difficulties of access to information technology.

50. While acknowledging the financial problems of the United Nations mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General, his delegation nevertheless failed to understand the reasons why the United Nations Information Centre in Sana'a should be merged with the UNDP office and placed under the management of the Programme's regional director. It was vital that the Centre should once again be independent and separate and that a new director should be appointed as soon as possible. A reduction in local personnel might only reflect negatively on the work of the Centre. The Committee on Information at its twenty-first session in May had underscored the importance of examining all facets of the problem and of taking account, on a case-by-case basis, of the view of the host country, in order that any decision made would not reflect negatively on the activities and objectives of the information centres. The policy of merging the institutions could lead to a reduction in the range of services those centres offered, at a time when everyone looked to an improvement in the effectiveness of their activities.

51. Having embarked on the path to democracy and freedom of expression, Yemen set great store by programmes to train and upgrade the qualifications of media personnel. The importance of laying foundations to enable developing and least developed countries and the media in those countries to gain access to necessary information in their own languages must be emphasized. It would not only broaden their participation but also help to strengthen the principles of justice and equality between peoples and to tighten the bonds between cultures and civilizations. That would only prove possible if developing countries were given assistance in developing their communications and information infrastructures and if their needs and priorities were taken into account.

52. **Ms. Critchlow** (Guyana) drew attention to draft resolution A/C.4/55/L.17, noting that Guyana had abstained during its adoption. She took the opportunity of reiterating her delegation's continued support for the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories and requested that Guyana should be included in the list of countries voting in favour of the resolution.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.